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SUBJECT: FRENCH MEDIA REACTION: MONTREAL CLIMATE CONFERENCE

11. Summary. During the run-up to the eleventh Conference of the Parties under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Montreal November 28-December 9, the French press relentlessly criticized the U.S. and highlighted the "intransigent" attitude of the "world's largest polluter." Commentary in the media tended to be dismissive of the U.S. commitment to combat climate change, noting technological investments are not enough. Instead, the Kyoto Protocol with its binding emission reductions was praised and the U.S. was singled out for refusing to ratify it. The Bush administration was portrayed as being out of touch with an American public that is increasingly aware of the consequences of climate change. Environment persists as one of the perennial issues sparking anti-American criticism in French media reports and editorial commentary. As Paris continues our efforts to tell the U.S. side of the story to a audience, we also ask for Washington's assistance with providing high-level spokespeople willing to engage French media, whether in person or via DVC. End summary.

Multi-pronged Outreach Effort

12. The French tend to see Kyoto as the litmus test of climate change sincerity, and therefore the press rarely focuses on U.S. efforts to fight climate change. Embassy Paris has been working to explain American policy and to highlight our achievements. The EST section has developed a French-language power point presentation on U.S. climate change actions, and EST staff has been programmed by PA for presentations to various groups around the country, including to the leading journalism school in France. The Public Affairs Section, in cooperation with EST colleagues, wrote an op-ed for Ambassador Stapleton's signature and placed it in one in the nation's premiere business dailies this fall. Public Affairs staff has also recently responded to a national petition drive (some 15,000 signatures) urging the U.S. to ratify Kyoto and met with the organizing group's leadership. Additionally, the Information Resource Center distributed the Department's comprehensive "Energy Needs, Clean Development and Climate Change" publication to a targeted group of contacts, including environmental journalists.

November 28-29 Media Summary:

13. In the run-up to the meeting, the dailies reported the talks were going to be "tough" (economic Les Echos on November 28) and "stormy" (business-oriented La Tribune on November 28) with "Europe and the U.S. heating up over the climate" (free daily 20 Minutes on November 28). 20 Minutes was hopeful that the U.S. would "use this summit as an opportunity to come back into the Kyoto process. and get a fresh start on the issue of climate change in cooperation with the Protocol's signatory countries." La Tribune for its part lamented: "in light of the U.S.'s position as regards the Kyoto Protocol, a clash with the other participants at the Montreal Summit appears to be inevitable." Media also insisted on America's "isolation" and the difficult task of convincing the U.S. to make any commitments to reducing CO2 emissions (mid-day news on state-run France 2 on November 28). Coverage of the conference was sparse during negotiations, but one economic daily said: "by refusing any compromise, the U.S. is driving the Montreal conference to chaos but for some, however, all hope is not yet lost." (La Tribune on December 8). As the COP 11 was winding down most outlets showed guarded enthusiasm with headlines such as: "Kyoto Gets a Second Wind" (regional daily Le Telegramme 12/11), "A Ray of Hope in Montreal" (regional daily La Charente Libre 12/12), "A Breath of Air for the Kyoto Protocol" (Communist l'Humanite 12/12).

14. Editorial commentary immediately prior to and on the first days of the conference focused on the key points subject to negotiation in Montreal with an emphasis on the question of what to do after Kyoto? Left-of-center Le Monde on November 29 headlined: "Worldwide Alert on the Climate at the Conference in Montreal." Environment journalist for the daily Herve Kempf stood out from his peers for observantly writing: "The U.S. uses the argument that the Kyoto Protocol imposes no obligations on developing countries such as China or India to curb CO2 emissions despite the fact that these countries are leading economic powers in order to justify its position. the fact is that this is a true statement and something that must be dealt with."

15. Some dailies highlighted the American public's heightened awareness of climate change phenomena since hurricane Katrina. This awareness, commentators noted, has led to a growing rift between American public opinion and the administration's

position. Le Figaro said that sadly: "hurricane Katrina is the best lobbyist the Kyoto Protocol has ever had" (December 10).

16. State or regional, as opposed to federal, initiatives to deal with climate change, for example, the Northeast Climate Action Plan, were outlined in dailies such as Le Figaro, Liberation and Le Monde. Le Figaro's Caroline de Malet on November 28 wrote that these programs to limit greenhouse gas emissions at the state level reveal "George W. Bush's isolation with regard to the rank and file." Catholic La Croix on November 29 noted that while the "expectation for the conference is that the American administration will attempt to block any progress within the framework of Kyoto, some progress has occurred in the U.S. Many states have taken it upon themselves to reduce their emissions." Following the conference, dailies such as regional La Charente Libre reported that 70% of Americans are concerned by climate change and wondered whether "George W. Bush is the only American left who is not?" (December 12)

17. On November 29, business-oriented daily La Tribune's editorialist Pascal Aubert asked whether the best approach to fighting global warming is to "constrain or convince?" He went on to say: "The international community remains divided on global warming and will be hard pressed to stand united in Montreal. The limitations of voluntary emissions reduction have become apparent. and it is illusory to believe, like the U.S. does, that technological progress is enough to curb climate change."

December 8-13 Media Summary:

18. Editorial commentary during the conference itself was rare with dailies preferring to bring up related issues to the summit such as the Inuit organization that filed a law suit against the U.S. for not doing enough to fight the thawing of the Arctic icecaps.

19. Post-conference commentary gave the overall summit results some praise, but charged that the American "administration continues to play the role of the bad boy in climate change negotiations" (Le Monde on December 12). For regional daily Le Telegramme the "real 'bad guys' at this conference were not the Americans but the Russians who unsuspectingly blocked all negotiations at the last minute." "A great step for humanity and a small hop for the U.S" wrote Bruno Cot in weekly center-right news magazine l'Express on December 15. "The U.S., which remains the world's foremost polluter, has agreed to sign a text on the condition that it does not commit it to anything." Most dailies agreed that the adoption of the Clean Development Mechanism represents "a huge step forward in the fight against global warming" (business-oriented La Tribune on December 12).

110. Dailies and weeklies noted the speech by former president Bill Clinton toward the close of the conference that further "annoyed and isolated George W. Bush's administration" (Le Figaro on December 12). Regional daily La Charente Libre on December 12 editorialized: "Bill Clinton is light years from George Bush who looks out for the interests of his friends in the oil business. The political and popular success that Bill Clinton had in Montreal doubtless led the U.S. to adopt a low profile."

111. Comment: Overall, commentary before and after the Montreal conference jibes with the official GOF position as set out in reftel. Public Affairs regretted it was not possible to organize a digital video conference with chief U.S. climate negotiator Harlan Watson (similar to the DVC set up last year prior to COP 10). Several French environmental journalists had queried the Embassy regarding the U.S. position going into the COP and we relayed that request, more than once, to the Department. In the lead up to future climate change meetings, we recommend the Department make it a priority to make U.S. officials available for press opportunities to explain U.S. policies and actions on climate change. There is, for example, another possibility for a DVC prior to next month's ministerial meeting of the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Energy and the Climate. STAPLETON